



EPA Rule Leaves Gulf Coast Communities Burdened With More Toxic Pollution

Community groups' lawsuit challenges EPA's weakened protections against toxic air pollution from polyvinyl chloride facilities

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Washington, D.C. —

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When Dorothy Felix of Mossville, Louisiana, learned that the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency was going to finally cut toxic pollution from the polyvinyl chloride (PVC) plant nearby, she rejoiced. But after EPA reversed its plan to protect the community in the final rule, she and others in the Mossville community who breathe in the plant's toxic fumes must restart a decade-long effort to get these basic limits on toxic air pollution.

Represented by the public interest law firm Earthjustice, Mossville Environmental Action Now (MEAN), Louisiana Environmental Action Network (LEAN), Air Alliance Houston, and Sierra Club have filed a lawsuit today to challenge the weaker protections as unlawful and arbitrary. The groups also filed a petition asking EPA administrator Lisa Jackson to reconsider her decision voluntarily.

"After years of work to obtain the stronger air protection we need in Mossville, Louisiana, it was a shock to our community when EPA suddenly changed course and singled us out for weaker standards as compared to the rest of the nation," said Dorothy Felix of MEAN. "EPA should stay true to its commitment to environmental justice and correct this unfairness by setting stronger air pollution limits that will protect our health as we and all Americans deserve."



PVC plants in the United States emit more than 1400 tons of hazardous air pollutants every year. (Shutterstock)

According to the EPA, there are 17 plants in the United States that manufacture polyvinyl chloride (PVC) resin, and they emit more than 1400 tons of hazardous air pollutants every year. These emissions include more than 270 tons per year of vinyl chloride, a known human carcinogen. They also include benzene, 1,3-butadiene, and dioxins, all of which also are known human carcinogens, as well as probable human carcinogens such as acetaldehyde and formaldehyde.

The EPA's emission standards for the plants in Mossville, Louisiana and Deer Park, Texas are especially weak, allowing these plants to emit toxic pollutants at far greater concentrations than other PVC facilities. In an about-face, the EPA decided without warning to create special categories for these two sources, even though the agency recognized that the pollution is similar to and could use the same types of pollution control technologies that are generally available and in use by other PVC facilities.

"Just across the highway from the local PVC facility are neighborhoods, two high schools, an elementary school, youth sports fields and churches but no air monitors to help protect the health of the people who live there," said Matthew Tejada, of Air Alliance Houston. "For the EPA to fail to set strong regulations for such facilities which emit cancer-causing pollution is stupefying."

"For far too long, the vinyl plastics industry has released staggering levels of vinyl chloride, dioxin and other toxic pollutants into surrounding communities," said Mike Schade, Campaign Coordinator with the Center for Health, Environment & Justice (CHEJ). "Mossville is surrounded by more vinyl manufacturers than anywhere else in the country. This community should receive the greatest, not the weakest, protection. Shame on EPA for issuing weaker standards for this community, which has been overburdened with toxic pollution for much too long."

Although the agency claimed legal authority to issue weaker standards for these two plants, it did not address the need for stronger public health protection in its decision. Notably, the owners of both plants have billions of dollars in revenue each year, according to the EPA, and could afford to clean up their toxic emissions at least to the same level as the rest of the industry.

"EPA's decision to allow so much more toxic pollution into American communities is disturbing," said Earthjustice attorney Jim Pew. "It is hard to see how this rule honors the agency's longstanding commitments to protect community health and provide environmental justice, particularly in the Gulf region. We hope Administrator Jackson will consider the consequences of her decision on the residents of Mossville, Deer Park, and other American communities and set the protective standards they need."

Here is a map showing the locations of PVC plants nationwide:



See emissions information for PVC facilities.

Emissions information for Deer Park and Mossville PVC facilities.

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